

The pandemic and the Veterinary Services – country lessons

Member of the Crisis Management Team

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Vienna, 09.11.2020

Why did the CVO become member of the Crisis Management Team?

- In Austria Veterinary Services are a department of the Ministry of Health
- Very close cooperation between the veterinary and the medical department is established since many years.
- The Crisis Management of food borne diseases outbreaks are under the responsibility of my department.
- With January there was a special situation:
 - New government started on the 15th of January
 - the reorganization of the ministry was not finalized due to political reasons in the past
 - and the General Director retired few months before.

Starting point

- The epidemic law in Austria is in its basic rule from the year 1914!
- There have been no real health crisis since many years!
- Last pandemic preparedness experiences are going back in the year 2006 – Influenza Crisis H5N1
- No real common rules on EU and international level
- There is no CMO / WHO - Delegate network, which is comparable with the CVO / OIE-Delegate Network
- Using the public health ideas and rules during an epidemic or pandemic is not well implementing in the official health services

First wave

- Special legislation for the Covid-19 - Situation was developed
- Biggest challenges:
 - Few common understanding of the disease
 - NO rules for trade in the crises – missing international communication and cooperation
 - border crossing in a pandemic situation – (Travelling rules are still not useful)
- Development of a procurement / delivery system on national level – Personal Protection materials, Tests, etc.
- Push up the Electronically Notification System from 50 notifications per month to 1000 notifications per day!!
- The shut down was the easy task

Challenges during the time of reopening

- Reopening of economic and social life was the challenge – we used veterinary strategies:
 - Monitoring programs for disease detection by people without symptoms
 - risk based approach in hospitals, special - care home or enterprises with precarious employment, living conditions (slaughter houses, distribution center, refugee center, seasonal workers, homeless people etc.)
 - Compartmentalization concept
 - We used this approach for the reopening of the football league and further developments for the organization of events like the Salzburg Festival and prevention concepts for concert halls and rehearsals of artists

Further special activities

- Outbreak detections and cluster analyzes – Human Resources!!
- Development, evaluation and evolution of test strategies
 - No emergency approval by test – like in the US
 - PCR, Antibody and now Antigen tests – No real international standards
- Development of a risk based disease control system – Traffic light System
 - Daily Incidence rate, Age of the infected person, Test capacity and clarification rate of cluster
- What we really missed - the right communication strategy to keep the people aware over the summer period

What did I learn?

- We have all the tools to be well prepared – we have to keep them running and we have to understand the value during the peace time!
- Most important is:
 - share international experiences on international and regional level – GFTADS
 - be prepared, by developing international rules and standards – OIE Level or also for region like the European Union
 - be transparent – rapid notification & Early warning Systems including international Databases - WAHIS
 - Obligatory real time exercises to be prepared – EUFMD Training

My personal conclusion:

Be never afraid of an animal disease outbreak again!

We could handle it!

It will not get worse than the situation in February and March

Thank YOU!

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